

Luke 14:25-33

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 4, 2022

I don't know if you have been on a blind date or not. If so, you likely approached it with questions. What will the person be like? What will they think of me? Blind dates occasionally work out, but even then someone thought the two would make a good couple.

We don't care for uncertainties and are usually warned, "Look before you leap." Or we have been taught from little on, "Look both ways before you cross the street." So also Jesus says today

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GETTING INTO

- I. Set proper priorities v25-26
- II. Carry your cross v27
- III. Count the cost v28-33

Following Jesus involves setting proper priorities in your life. And that's not your family. The opening statement of Jesus grabs our attention. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." Wait a minute—didn't God teach us to love and obey our parents? Absolutely: that's the Fourth Commandment. It is part of his plan for earthly order and it is natural that we love our family members. However, if they oppose God's ways or interfere in our relationship with him, the choice is clear. God comes first, always and only. We love him so much that in comparison it looks like we are filled with hatred of all others.

It can happen that family gets in the way of faith. In lands where Christianity is a minority religion, a person who becomes a believer may be ostracized. They are viewed as being disloyal to their parents and to ancestors. Jesus cared for his mother as we see when he was on the cross and provided for her future care by assigning John to look after her. Yet when several members of his family tried to deter him from his mission, "Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'"

If you have a Christian family who knows and loves the Savior and encourages you in the faith, give thanks to God. Even then you may have to make choices. Sometimes family members plan their own activities that take you away from the Lord and serving him or hearing his Word. There may be negative examples to counteract. Many dads give the impression that church is for women and children.

Boys growing up in that situation have a hurdle to overcome to continue as active Christians when they become older. When it comes to choosing a career, sometimes even Christian parents will try to steer their children to a more lucrative job than church work. Let proper priorities guide you.

The proper priority also is not self. Self-love and a desire for self-preservation are natural. Again that is not wrong in itself, as God protects life in the Fifth Commandment and he wants you to take care of what he has given you. That's different than viewing what I want as most important. We often seek our own comfort and desires. We want to sleep in or pursue our favorite sports or hobbies when it's time to worship God. Or maybe popularity is most important and being a Jesus person isn't at the top of the list. Our Savior calls on us to give it all up, everything we have, or we can't be his disciples.

In our confirmation vows we declared we would give up our life for the Lord if necessary, rather than fall away from him. Did we mean it? Do we still? Following Jesus calls for self-denial when it comes to sinful pleasures or anything that places him second in our lives.

God is number one in our existence. There really is no contest. He has no rival. He is the source of life itself and all we have. He is our Savior, who gave all for us. Do we treat him as number one? We see our failures, times when we give our Lord the back seat in our life. He truly shows where he deserves to be. He gave his life to forgive us. It's not easy to keep Jesus number one. Temptations are great, but God is greater. Go to him for strength to set and follow proper priorities.

II.

As we continue to examine what it means to follow Jesus we see it involves carrying a cross. Our cross is opposition and persecution. We commonly identify the cross with Christianity. Jesus carried a cross as he went to die for us. So we may have to bear a cross for him. The cross may be heavy and dig into our back or cause bruises. There is active persecution of Christians. We see it in the New Testament. Stephen died as a martyr for his faith. The Apostle John spent some years in exile. Saul, whom we know as Paul, at first persecuted believers in Jesus. After being converted and serving as a missionary, he likely met death for his faith. Such events continued in history. Christians were fed to the lions in Rome. They were burned at the stake. There were many sources of persecution. Some were official actions of the government, while others came from a wayward church that had strayed from the truth. There still are actions against Christians in modern times.

You and I have probably not faced such conditions. Yet there can also be subtle forms of opposition that are just as dangerous. In fact, maybe we don't recognize

them and succumb without a fight. We hear comments like, “Oh, you’re that strict church!” like it’s something to be avoided. Others remind us, “It’s the twenty-first century,” as if we hadn’t noticed, as they challenge God’s standards. We’re viewed as less than intellectually inclined if we accept the Bible as God’s inspired and inerrant Word. We must be naive. We may be avoided and not invited to activities because we won’t join in sinful behavior. As a result we may regret being Christians and wish we were not so labeled, or we compromise and go with the flow, gradually drifting from loyalty to our Savior.

We would prefer to have a life of glory as God’s people. Isn’t that the way it should be? Have an easy life, be at the top. After all, we’re on the right side. Some people even promise it. “Belong to Jesus and you will be prosperous, healthy, and have no problems.” Then it’s really devastating when difficulties occur. Some renounce their faith. Be realistic. Know that troubles will come because you are a Christian. The world hated and opposed Jesus. Why should we expect anything better? We will suffer for our connection with Jesus, but he strengthens us to endure and to remain faithful. What we’re speaking about with carrying a cross is not the general trouble that everyone experiences as we live in a sinful world, like aches and pains, disappointments and failures. It’s not what we bring on ourselves by our own bad behavior. We don’t seek to cause trouble and then claim persecution. This suffering comes because of our confession of faith in the true God. It is a privilege to carry that cross.

III.

As he opens our eyes and our understanding to know what we’re getting into, Jesus also teaches us to count the cost. He used the example of building a tower. It is intended as a fine structure, prominent on the landscape. Before starting construction you plan and budget for the project, to make sure you can carry it out. You wouldn’t want to start and then have to leave it unfinished because you lacked the resources. Then the partially finished structure would stand as an embarrassing monument to your folly and waste of resources.

Jesus also cited the example of war. You don’t attack an enemy blindly. You obtain information and evaluate your manpower and weaponry. If you are greatly outnumbered (the text gave the example of twenty thousand soldiers against ten thousand, a ratio of two to one) and victory is not obtainable, you better reconsider. You might look for allies to help or seek peace.

The examples Jesus used were apt pictures. Our Christian life is like a tower as it is visible and is to be a monument to God’s glory. It’s also a war. Our opponents include the devil, who bombards us with temptations to sin, to despair when we realize our sins or to pride if we think we have done well. The world offers

allurements and wants us to join in sin. Our own flesh plies us with sinful desires and selfishness. A mighty battle occurs, with life at stake, our eternal life.

How will we meet the cost of discipleship? Considering what is involved, we might give up. The situation appears hopeless. "There's no way I can do all that." We come to that conclusion about many of our dreams in life. As a youngster maybe we wanted to be President of the United States. As adults we recognize that we have neither the following nor the funds for a campaign. Discouraging us from being his followers was not Jesus' purpose here.

Yet in a sense he does want to discourage us. He wants us to give up on trying to meet the conditions for discipleship by our own efforts or resources. Do not look to your inner strength or resolve to try harder. You won't make it. We are sinful. We will never progress beyond an outward attachment to Jesus. We won't get the foundation laid, much less construct a tower.

It can only happen through Jesus that we become and remain his followers. He provides what it means to be a Christian. There are things that are good to know about what we are getting into. Our Lord Jesus has removed our sins. He defeated the foe. He undid all that Satan accomplished. He paid for every sin on our record. Jesus defeated temptation and lived a perfect life. He broke the hold and power of death. He won heaven for us. His victory and salvation are yours. He made you his own by sending the Holy Spirit to convert you. Repent of your sins and trust in Jesus. He carried the cross and met the cost for you and for me and for all.

His work for us motivates us to follow him with unyielding devotion and joyful faith. We are a new creation. His love compels us to dedicate our life to him. Christ's Gospel love is more effective in producing results than a pep talk from a coach or the address of an inspiring speaker. You can get all charged up from one of them and still go out and lack the follow through. But Jesus gives you power. Draw on the strength of God himself through the means of grace. He also provides the armor to withstand the enemy attacks (items like the helmet of salvation and shield of faith) and to fight offensively and successfully (using the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God).

Jesus was not discouraging his followers with these words, to make us give up. Do give up on yourself. The key is Jesus. Through him you have become a soldier of Christ. Follow him in faith boldly into battle against sin and Satan. Find forgiveness for your failings and strength to live each day as his child and an heir of eternal life. You're getting into something worthwhile and wonderful.